



## Women in the Media

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2012 marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Ms. magazine*, a publication that both chronicled and nurtured the feminist movement. *Ms.* covered topics that had long been ignored or glossed over in mainstream society — reproductive rights, lesbian relationships, balancing motherhood and work, sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence and more. When *Ms.* was founded in 1972, women weren't allowed to get a loan without their husbands' permission. They were paid much less than men and were expected to wear girdles to work. Abortion was illegal and the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental disorder.

We've come a long way since 1972. The mainstream media has more female reporters, editors, anchors and producers than ever before. Women's issues are treated more seriously and covered more frequently in major newspapers and broadcasts. But serious problems remain.

This discussion guide explores the status of women in the media. It draws on information from the Women's Media Center and a panel discussion of feminist writers, bloggers and journalists at Stanford University, part of a weeklong series of events commemorating the *Ms.* anniversary.



"Ms. at 40 and the Future of Feminism." Jan. 26, 2012, Stanford University

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## Facts and figures

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### Women as news producers

- Newspapers: The percentage of women in newsrooms remained roughly stable from 1999 to 2010, hovering around 37%. — *American Society of News Editors*
- Television: In 2011, women comprised 40% of TV news staff, but only 28% of news directors. — *Bureau of Labor Statistics*
- Radio: A talk show trade magazine named only 16 women to its “Heavy Hundred” list. National Public Radio is a notable exception in the industry, with a female CEO, a woman heading the news department and a roughly even split of male and female reporters and hosts.
- Training: From 1999 to 2010, women outnumbered men 2 to 3 among journalism and mass communication graduates. — *2010 Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates*

### Women as newsmakers

- Globally in 2011, only 24% of news stories were about women. — *Media and Gender Monitor*
- Only 21.7% of guests on Sunday morning news shows in 2011 were women. — *American University, Women and Politics Institute*
- “The relative lack of female voices reflects the broader world. ... Men are still largely in charge in government at all levels, in corporations and nearly all other aspects of society. That means, by default, there are going to be more male than female news sources.” — *NPR ombudsman, 2010*

By deciding  
who gets to talk,  
what shapes the debate,  
who writes, and  
what is important  
enough to report,  
media shape our  
understanding of  
**who we are** and  
**what we can be.**

Source: “The Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2012,” a report of the Women’s Media Center.

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## From the Writers' Mouths

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“We need people who are living it to tell the truth about it. And we need to provide them with access to be heard. . . . The people who are being mowed down in this society [need to] feel that we have a stake in their lives, and that they have one in ours.”

### Marcia Ann Gillespie

Gender and Race Activist  
Former Editor-in-Chief of *Ms.* magazine and *Essence*

“In every room where these stories were told, we all left feeling less crazy, less alone, and more pissed off. And that’s what feminism is. It’s hearing your pain and your struggle in another woman’s voice.”



### Shelby Knox

Feminist Blogger and Activist  
Subject of 2005 documentary “The Education of Shelby Knox”

“What a difference it makes to have your own media. We don’t have to convince anybody that they should be covering some of these critical issues. . . . Owning your own media is great power, because you can not only say it like it is, through our feminist lens, but you can influence the way other media is reporting on the issues.”



### Katherine Spillar

Executive Editor of *Ms.* magazine  
Executive Vice President, Feminist Majority Foundation

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## From the Writers' Mouths

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"I think we're reaching a crux right now, with intergenerational feminism. . . . The feminist movement is trying to shift to adapt to the new sexism that young people, especially, experience. And it's not the same type of sexism. We're in the boardroom, we're in the workplaces, a lot of those doors have been busted down. But sexism is not dead."



### Miriam Zoila Pérez

Writer, Consultant, Blogger, Activist  
Editor, Feministing.com

Young activists and bloggers "are doing your thing online, and many of the older feminists aren't as engaged online." We still need a magazine like *Ms.* "to find all those niches [of feminism] and pull them together. We have to learn about each other."

### Suzanne Braun Levine

Writer, Editor, Lecturer, Blogger, and Activist  
Co-Founder and first editor of *Ms.* magazine



"We still are dealing with the same old sexism in the culture, the misogyny. . . . There are messages out there that young women and girls don't need to worry about these things because someone else is taking care of it."



### Helen Zia

Writer, Journalist  
Former Executive Editor of *Ms.* magazine

# Feminist media must remain 'unfettered and outrageous'

By **Miranda Mammen**, Founder and editor [womensglib.wordpress.com](http://womensglib.wordpress.com)

The Ms. at 40 and the Future of Feminism symposium brought together a panel six feminist writers, bloggers, and journalists to discuss the future of feminist media. Suzanne Braun Levine, Marcia Ann Gillespie, Helen Zia and Katherine Spillar reflected on their time at *Ms.* magazine, while Shelby Knox and Miriam Zoila Pérez shared experiences with blogging and online organizing. The conversation touched on themes of progress, challenge, solidarity, and legacy. We have certainly come a long way, baby. But where do we go from here?

The panelists drew on the successes and failures of the past to comment on strategies for the future of the movement. They characterized *Ms.* as a pioneer of feminist media, one of the first publications to incorporate activism into traditional journalism.

They emphasized the power of media-making, particularly for women who have been silenced by patriarchal culture and socialized to be the passive audience to history rather than the writers of its narrative. *Ms.* gave women the opportunity and the agency to comment on issues that had been previously ignored. As Spillar said, "What a difference it makes to own your own media."

Panelists discussed the relative merits of print publications and online organizing tools. Levine suggested that part

of the intergenerational tension that seems to plague the movement stems from the divide between the two types of media. Compared to a march that might take six months to organize, she said, an online blast can unite outraged feminists in just a few hours.

Indeed, for all the popular culture criticism of social media "slacktivism," it sure gets results. Pérez recounted a feminist success from 2007, when Wal-Mart pulled a sexually suggestive product for girls after an outraged customer sent it to a blog. (The offending product? Pink underwear with

"Who needs credit cards..." written across the front, displayed in the juniors' section.) More recently, feminist media leader Jessica Valenti has credited social media with pushing Susan G. Komen for the Cure to backtrack from its controversial decision to pull hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding for Planned Parenthood.

Today's activists harness the power of many tools — public marches and petitions, phone calls and votes, blog posts and tweets. The movement has enjoyed many laudable successes, but panelists agreed that much work remains. "The more things change, the more they stay the same," Gillespie said.

There remains a profound need to be "unfettered and outrageous," as Helen Zia put it, in the struggle for gender equity.

They emphasized the power of media-making, particularly for women who have been silenced by patriarchal culture and socialized to be the passive audience to history.

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## Learn More

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**[gender.stanford.edu/activism](http://gender.stanford.edu/activism)**

**Women's Media Center:** [The Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2012](#)

**Clayman Institute on iTunes:** [Watch the panel of feminist writers, Gloria Steinem's keynote address and other events](#)

**Stanford Report:** [Four decades - and counting - of feminist journalism](#)

**Gloria Steinem discussion guide:** [Ms. at 40 and the Future of Feminism](#)

**CoverItLive:** [Viewers live-tweet Gloria Steinem's speech](#)

**Suzanne Braun Levine:** [What We Left Behind: Girdles, Silence and Illegal Abortion](#)

**Stanford Report:** [Stanford University symposium, exhibits, talk by Gloria Steinem commemorate Ms. magazine's 40 years](#)

**Fem 2pt0:** [Does Feminism Have a Future?](#)

The Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University creates research and programs to move beyond the stall in the gender revolution. Our goal is to create a research agenda that will drive new solutions to move society forward. This fact sheet was created by Jessica Parks, a Stanford graduate journalism student, with assistance from Miranda Mammen, a Stanford sophomore and feminist blogger.